

A's News Clips, Saturday, April 17, 2010

Dallas Braden leads Oakland A's past Baltimore

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Compared with his colorful personality, Dallas Braden's best work on the mound often is very subtle.

There was nothing flashy about his outing Friday night. It was just effective.

The left-hander allowed three hits over seven innings and won his second straight start, as the A's took care of the Baltimore Orioles 4-2 in front of 12,225 fans at the Oakland Coliseum.

The A's are 8-4 and have a two-game lead in the American League West, largely because of their rotation.

Oakland's starting staff is 6-0 with a 2.48 ERA. Since 1982, the only other time an A's rotation won its first six decisions was in 2003.

"It's awesome, they've been going deep every single game," closer Andrew Bailey said. "I (like) the group of guys and the versatility we have. We've got the power lefty in Brett (Anderson) and a finesse guy in Dallas. "... All the starters are going deep in games, giving our bullpen a rest."

The afternoon began with news that Anderson, the A's highly touted second-year pitcher, agreed to a four-year, \$12.5 million contract extension. He's considered the future ace of the staff.

But Braden's work has been just as important this season. He's allowed just six earned runs over his first three starts, and he's issued just three walks in 20 innings.

"I always like to stress strike one," he said.

Braden (2-0) flashed his trademark humor in describing his only rough stretch of the night — Ty Wigginton's line-drive two-run homer in the fifth, which came after a four-pitch walk to Garrett Atkins.

"That ball Wigginton hit is probably sitting somewhere on my coffee table right now back in Stockton," he said.

Speaking of Stockton, Braden was well aware that his tidy pitching helped Friday's game wrap up in 2 hours, 9 minutes — or 2:09, as in the area code of his hometown.

The A's took a lead in the second when Jake Fox's sacrifice fly scored Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Rajai Davis singled to the lead off the third, stole second and went to third when Baltimore catcher Matt Wieters' throw skipped into center field.

Davis scored on Ryan Sweeney's grounder to short for a 2-0 lead.

Cliff Pennington padded the lead in the fourth when he yanked a two-out triple inside the first-base line, scoring Fox and Gabe Gross to make it 4-0.

The switch-hitting shortstop leads the A's with 10 RBIs. Pennington is hitting just .237, but six of his nine hits are for extra bases.

He also turned in several fine defensive plays as did first baseman Daric Barton, who made a diving catch of Miguel Tejada's foul pop-up in the fourth.

"We've been playing good defense behind (the starting pitchers), and I think that makes it easier on them," Sweeney said.

Braden didn't allow his first base runner until Nick Markakis doubled with one out in the fourth.

A's second baseman Mark Ellis was out of the lineup for a fifth straight game with a strained left hamstring. But he jogged before the game and took grounders.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki, who's 3 for 26 over his last seven games and hitting .189, was out of the lineup but entered as a defensive replacement in the top of the ninth.

Bailey finally got his first save opportunity in the 12th game of the season. He allowed a double in the ninth but finished out the win.

TODAY: Orioles (Jeremy Guthrie 0-2) at A's (Justin Duchscherer 1-0), 1:05 p.m. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's update: Brett Anderson to sign four-year, \$12.5 million extension

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Anderson to get four-year, \$12.5 million extension

Left-hander Brett Anderson agreed to terms on a four-year, \$12.5 million contract extension Friday, as the A's moved swiftly to secure the pitcher they see anchoring their rotation for seasons to come.

Anderson joined the rotation last season at age 21 and went 11-11 with a 4.06 ERA. His poise, combined with his sterling second half, convinced the A's he was worth the investment.

Anderson led all rookies with 150 strikeouts last season and has yet to allow a run through two starts this year.

"I don't know if we've had a guy since I've been here who accomplished as much as he had at that age," general manager Billy Beane said. "And there's no reason to think he's not going to continue to get better."

Anderson will get \$500,000 this season, \$1 million in 2011, \$3 million in 2012 and \$5.5 million in 2013.

The A's hold club options of \$8 million for 2014 and \$12 million for 2015. There's a \$1.5 million buyout if either option is declined. Including a \$1 million signing bonus, the contract could pay Anderson \$31 million over six years.

The A's have bought out Anderson's arbitration years (2012-14) and his first year of free agency should they pick up the 2015 option.

Anderson said he's not worried about possibly bypassing his first year of free agency. "There's something to be said for being

(financially) secure at 22 years old," he said.

Last season, Anderson and fellow 21-year-old rookie Trevor Cahill were turned down for an apartment in Walnut Creek, told they were too young.

Longtime A's P.A. announcer Roy Steele will be honored with his own bobblehead for this afternoon's game against Baltimore. Steele, whose health issues have kept him away from the ballpark in recent years, will throw out the first pitch. "I think for a lot of fans, (Steele) is what they remember about the Coliseum," said Troy Smith, the A's senior director of in-stadium entertainment. ... Reliever Michael Wuertz, in his first rehab appearance for Triple-A Sacramento, had a 1-2-3 seventh inning Friday against Reno.

Chin Music: Brett Anderson, A's agree on four-year, \$12.5 million contract extension

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/16/2010 6:32PM.

There was big news before the A's even took the field for batting practice today, as left-hander Brett Anderson signed a contact extension that will pay him \$12.5 million over four years (2010-13). The A's hold club options for 2014 (\$8 million) and 2015 (\$12 million). Anderson gets a \$1.5 million buyout if either option is declined. The deal replaces the \$410,000 salary he was going to earn this season. He'll get \$500,000 this season; \$1 million in 2011; \$3 million in 2012 and \$5.5 million in 2013.

That's a pretty nice package for Anderson, 22, who's just two starts into his second big league season. But it's also a great deal for the A's. They buy out his arbitration-eligible years (2012-14) as well as the first year he would have been eligible for free agency (2015).

Anderson was asked if he thought twice about bypassing his first season of possible free agency. "There's something to be said for being secure at 22 years old," he said. "I can go out there and focus on pitching and not have to worry about too much else for right now."

It's obviously a big statement from the A's about the type of pitcher they see Anderson becoming. "I don't know if we've had a guy since I've been here who's accomplished as much as he has at that age," GM Billy Beane said. "And there's no reason to think he's not going to continue to get better."

—Second baseman Mark Ellis is out of the lineup for the fifth straight game with his hamstring injury. But he did some jogging and took grounders, so it would appear he's moving in the right direction. Kurt Suzuki, hitting just .189, gets a night off. Manager Bob Geren said Suzuki's been chasing some pitches he normally wouldn't, so Jake Fox gets a start at catcher. Geren also pointed out that Fox worked well with tonight's starter, Dallas Braden, on Sunday against the Angels.

Tonight's lineups:

A's
Davis CF
Barton 1B
Sweeney RF
Kouzmanoff 3B
Chavez DH
Fox C
Gross LF
Rosales 2B
Pennington SS
Braden LHP

Orioles
Jones CF
Markakis RF
Tejada 3B
Wieters C
Reimold DH
Scott LF
Atkins 1B
Wigginton 2B
Izturis SS
Millwood RHP

Braden keeps A's unbeaten rotation rolling

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Call Brett Anderson's contract an incentive. If a 22-year-old pitcher can receive a four-year, \$12.5 million deal, perhaps it can serve as motivation to others on the A's roster, especially other young starters.

So far in the 2010 season, motivation hasn't been an issue.

Oakland's rotation is 6-0 with a 2.48 ERA following Dallas Braden's seven solid innings in Friday night's 4-2 A's victory over the Orioles. It's the second time in 28 years an A's rotation opened a season 6-0.

With the news of Anderson's big payday, Braden, Gio Gonzalez and injured Trevor Cahill could be wondering about their place on baseball's financial ladder. All make little more than the \$400,000 minimum, including Braden, 26, the oldest of the bunch with the most service time.

"The early part of the decade, we had (Tim) Hudson, (Mark) Mulder and (Barry) Zito, and their performances fed off each other, and ultimately the contracts followed. It was the same for the position players," general manager Billy Beane said after reaching agreement with Anderson.

"It does provide for a carrot out there. Players like to know if they perform, they get rewarded, even at a young age."

The A's provided timely hitting (Cliff Pennington's two-out, two-run triple), impressive defense (Daric Barton's diving catch of a foul popup and two double plays he initiated), scoreless relief (Brad Ziegler in the eighth, Andrew Bailey in the ninth for his first save) and, of course, another strong start (Braden: three hits, one walk).

Braden's only mistake was surrendering a two-run homer to Ty Wigginton following a four-pitch walk to Garrett Atkins in the fifth inning. In a jolly mood afterward, Braden said the ball is "probably sitting on my coffee table in Stockton."

By then, the A's had scored four runs - nothing out of the ordinary for a team that entered the game ranked second in the American League in runs scored.

Five of Braden's 16 career wins are against the Orioles, baseball's worst team at 1-10. In three 2010 starts, Braden is 2-0 with a 2.70 ERA. The other four starters each are 1-0.

"More times than not, you'll be happy if you continue to keep your team in the game and not put the wear and tear on the bullpen throughout a long, rigorous season," Braden said. "The starting staff's done a good job of that so far."

Next: Justin Duchschere today and the \$12.5 million man Sunday.

"It's been great," Beane said. "We've got a lot of depth this year. Each guy hands a baton off to the next guy. Each time you look up, we match up pretty well against the other pitcher."

Beane said he'd consider other long-term deals for certain players, and catcher Kurt Suzuki is a likely candidate, but Suzuki said his agent has not heard from the team.

Suzuki didn't start Friday but entered in the ninth. Mark Ellis missed his fifth straight game with a sore hamstring.

Anderson receives \$12.5 million deal

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Last year, **Brett Anderson** and **Trevor Cahill** were denied multiple times while apartment hunting in Walnut Creek.

"They said we were too young and baseball players," Anderson said. "We would've been their best tenants ever. We had steady incomes and were there only half the time.

"Hopefully, with this, I can kind of live where I want."

"This" is Anderson's four-year, \$12.5 million contract through 2013, which was announced on Friday. The deal, which has not yet been signed, includes two option years that, if exercised, would make the package \$31 million.

Anderson emerged as last year's ace, going 8-4 with a 2.96 ERA in his final 17 starts, and his 150 strikeouts led the staff. This year, he has thrown 12 scoreless innings in two starts, both against Seattle.

"We think Brett's a pretty unique talent," general manager **Billy Beane** said. "The more we saw of him, and the more we waited, the more expensive it was going to become."

Beane anticipates Anderson as a No. 1 starter, saying, "He's at 94 to 96 (mph) with great command. Strikes guys out. Gets groundballs. Great teammate and person. He has all the attributes you want out of a top-of-the-rotation starter."

Anderson gets a \$1 million signing bonus (four installments beginning Aug. 5) and salaries of \$500,000 this year, \$1 million in 2011, \$3 million in 2012 and \$5.5 million in 2013. The club options are \$8 million in 2014 and \$12 million in 2015. If the A's don't exercise either option, they'd pay a \$1.5 million buyout.

The contract would extend through Anderson's three arbitration years and first year of free agency.

For the record, Anderson and Cahill found a place in San Francisco last year - near the Giants' ballpark. This year, Cahill's in the East Bay. Anderson's staying in the city.

"There's something to be said for being secure at 22," Anderson said.

Briefly: Ryan Sweeney has hit safely in each of his 11 games. ... **Michael Wuertz** pitched a perfect inning for Triple-A Sacramento in his first game on a rehab assignment.

A'S LEADING OFF

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/17/2010

Time away: The A's are off Monday, so Gio Gonzalez plans to fly to San Diego after Sunday's game to visit his girlfriend, Valerie Mathias, who has had memory problems since a car accident. He starts Tuesday against the Yankees.

A's, Anderson agree to four-year deal (UPDATE with details)

John Shea on the A's beat today . . .

The A's signed Brett Anderson to a four-year contract, an agreement that runs through 2013 with options for 2014 and 2015.

As a result, the team bought out Anderson's arbitration years and first year of free agency.

He was the ace last year, going 11-11 with a 4.06 ERA and led the staff with 150 strikeouts. His final 17 starts, he went 8-4 with a 2.96 ERA.

This year, he has 12 scoreless innings in two starts against Seattle. His next start is Sunday.

UPDATE

The details of the contract: It's a \$12.5 million guarantee over four years, and the max (including the two option years) is \$31 million.

He gets a \$1 million signing bonuses and salaries of \$500,000 this year (a \$90,000 raise over his original salary), \$1 million in 2011, \$3 million in 2012 and \$5.5 million in 2013.

The club options are for \$8 million in 2014 and \$12 million in 2015. If the A's don't exercise either option, they'd pay a \$1.5 million buyout.

"At 21 years old, to do what he did in the major leagues (last year), I don't know if we've had a guy since I've been here who has accomplished as much as he has at that age, and there's no reason to think he's not going to continue to get better," general manager Billy Beane said. "He was pitching in the major leagues last year, when he could've been a junior

in college, and he was pitching very well. Second half of last year and the way he's started out this year indicates he's going to be one of the premier pitchers in the league for many years."

Anderson told a cute story. When he and Trevor Cahill went apartment hunting a year ago, they got turned down several times.

"We couldn't get a place in Walnut Creek because they said we were too young and baseball players," Anderson said. "We tried to get two apartments, a house and a condo. We would've been their best tenants ever. We had a steady income and were there only half the time.

"Hopefully, with this (contract), I can kind of live where I want."

Having been turned down in the East Bay, Anderson and Cahill went elsewhere -- and found a place in San Francisco, across the street from the Giants' ballpark.

This year, Anderson's getting his own place in the city.

"There's something to be said for being secure at 22," he said.

Henderson glad McGwire acknowledged steroids use

Associated Press, Friday, April 16, 2010

Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson said on Friday that former teammate Mark McGwire is better for admitting earlier this year that he used steroids during his major league career.

Henderson and McGwire were key components of an Oakland juggernaut that dominated the American League West when they were teammates with the Athletics for much of 1989-95.

Henderson, who returned to the Oakland organization this year as a roving instructor, talked about McGwire and his return to baseball during a news conference at Banner Island Ballpark. Henderson is in town working with the Stockton Ports, Oakland's Class A affiliate.

Henderson said he was proud of McGwire, who is now the hitting coach of the St. Louis Cardinals.

"It made him a better man," Henderson said. "He realized that the truth had to come out as it is. It was haunting him and hurting him and he was feeling guilty about it, so he wanted to get it off his chest and move forward."

Like Henderson, McGwire is getting back into the game this year.

Henderson said there was little knowledge of the effects of performance-enhancing substances when he and McGwire were leading the Athletics to three AL West titles and a 1989 World Series championship.

"That era, everybody got into a situation that they found something that gave them an edge," Henderson said. "At that time, it wasn't really illegal, and we couldn't find out what it was doing to the ballplayer — helping them or hurting them. Now that it's come out that was something bad for the game, (McGwire) came out and spoke the truth."

Henderson played with an edge during his 25-year career in the majors with nine teams. A 10-time AL All-Star, Henderson holds major league records for stolen bases, runs scored, unintentional walks and leadoff home runs.

After being inducted into the Hall of Fame last summer, Henderson said he wants to give back to the game and the young players following in his footsteps.

Trim and fit at age 51, Henderson is working with Oakland farmhands on the finer details of hitting, running the base paths and stealing bases. He had been away from the game since 2007, his last year as a coach with the New York Mets and also the year he officially turned in his retirement papers as a player.

"I want to be around the game of baseball and I want to teach the game of baseball," Henderson said. "It's great to be back with the Oakland A's, where I started from and spent most of my career. They're giving me the opportunity to come back and share some of the knowledge of what I learned about playing the game and how to go about it the right way."

The Ports play in the California League, where Henderson began his professional career in 1977 with the Modesto A's.

As an 18-year-old, Henderson hit .345 with Modesto and led the league with 95 steals without being caught. He set a major league record with 130 stolen bases for Oakland in 1982.

Henderson's last game in the big leagues was with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2003, but he continued to look for playing opportunities after that. Now, Henderson says he is content to move on to the next stage of his baseball career.

"I love the game of baseball," Henderson said. "Now it's time for me to give the knowledge to the young kids and let them go out and do it and still get the glory and thrill out of it."

Giants' hitters need to embrace AT&T Park

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

One of the biggest mistakes a baseball team can make, in pursuit of the postseason, is to be at odds with its ballpark. The Giants are right on the verge of that crisis, and it will be up to **Aubrey Huff**, among others, to keep smiling.

Huff was frustrated, and understandably so, when he watched three titanic shots stay in the park Wednesday against Pittsburgh. Everything he'd heard was true, and worse. As the team left town for Dodger Stadium, he surely was convinced that virtually all of his home runs will come on the road.

That's probably true, but the Giants should remember the lesson they learned at Candlestick long ago: Learn to love the place. Embrace it. Build nutty marketing campaigns around it. Humm-baby. Only the opponents get their daubers down.

Huff needs to know that he built a ton of goodwill, among fans and media, with that inside-the-park homer. Replays showed him laughing and gesturing during a wild celebration in the dugout. It brought the personality out of him, and those images have staying power, likely to make people more tolerant whenever he takes a couple of 0-for-4s.

This is what the Giants are: unified, passionate, living by the line drive and a wealth of pitching. They've got enough to win the division, and as long as they stay strong in the rotation and bullpen, that will be the case. Don't even *think* of altering AT&T's dimensions, in any way. It's the essence of ballpark perfection. Any other viewpoint is self-defeating.

A most intriguing draft

Start with this: There's no second-guessing the Giants' drafting **Madison Bumgarner** with the No. 10 selection in the 2007 draft. The pick was heralded throughout the scouting world, and over his first two minor-league seasons, he went 27-5 with a 1.65 ERA. That's the guy you want.

It's just that we've all had a look at **Jason Heyward** now, and he's the second coming of *somebody* (**Fred McGriff? Dave Parker?**), and Bumgarner has undeniably regressed. In his first two starts for Triple-A Fresno, his stats are almost surreal: 7 innings, 21 hits and 11 runs allowed (all earned), complete with the same diminished velocity the team saw in spring training.

The Atlanta Braves had long set their sights on Heyward, who grew up in Georgia and had everyone's attention in high school. They had their fingers crossed when Seattle took pitcher **Phillippe Aumont** with the No. 11 pick, Florida chose high school catcher **Matt Dominguez** at No. 12, and Cleveland decided on first baseman **Beau Mills** out of Lewis & Clark College.

They could not believe their good fortune when Heyward was still available for their No. 14 selection. Teams might have been wary of signing-bonus demands, but there was no mystery about his potential, his attitude or his background (the son of two Dartmouth-educated parents). "Future cleanup hitter," read one prominent scouting report, and as we've seen so far, he is *all* of that.

Suffice it to say it's far too early to give up on Bumgarner, but the Giants wouldn't mind seeing him bounce back. Quickly. The Heyward angle has become an annoyance.

Short-term Bonds

There's no way **Barry Bonds** becomes a full-time hitting coach, for anyone. He's far too intolerant and self-obsessed to endure a 162-game grind without actually taking the field. Hire him for two weeks of intensive training, though, and you won't regret it. Bonds' talent as a hitter was matched only by his scientific knowledge of the art. ... Nice job by **Ben Roethlisberger**, showing up greasy-haired and unshaven in the Steelers' locker to read an ill-worded statement (instead of speaking from the heart) and generally looking exactly like the type of guy who would commit the crimes in question. He should be suspended for that rock-headed performance alone. ... Let's hope we're all over the **Baron Davis** nostalgia. He shot barely 40 percent from the field, his three-point accuracy (27.7) ranked him 242nd in the league, and his floor leadership was mediocre at best. He's got three years left on his deal, and the Clippers would just as soon turn elsewhere.

Braden deals seven strong for the win

Southpaw supported by excellent defensive plays

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Maybe home runs are overrated.

The A's have been thriving without the help of many homers this season, and they won again Friday night without going deep a single time, beating the Orioles, 4-2.

The A's used what's becoming a familiar winning formula, mixing solid pitching, timely hitting, good base running and stellar defense together.

"If you're not going to hit a bunch of home runs, you've got to link hits together, you've got to get timely hits, run the bases and make the plays in the field, and get good starting pitching and solid relief pitching," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That's pretty much what we did. It was a really good all-around effort by everybody."

The A's had nine hits -- eight singles and Cliff Pennington's two-run triple -- and they all came off Orioles starter Kevin Millwood. Ryan Sweeney extended his hitting streak to 11 games with a fifth-inning single. Left fielder Gabe Gross went 3-for-3 with three singles and scored a run. Center fielder Rajai Davis singled in four at-bats, stole his sixth base of the season -- in six attempts -- and scored a run.

Left-hander Dallas Braden gave the A's another quality start and continued his ownership of the Orioles. He allowed just two runs over seven innings and improved to 5-1 lifetime against Baltimore with a 1.57 ERA. Five of his 16 career wins have come against the Orioles.

"I don't know that I'm that good against Baltimore," Braden said. "Just the matchups I sort of had so far have worked out for me. I've come out on top more times than not. That's about it."

On Friday, Braden came out on top because he got ahead of most of the Orioles' hitters he faced, pumping early strikes. He struck out four and walked just one, improving to 2-0 with a 2.70 ERA. A's starters are now 6-0 this season.

"I always like to stress strike one," Braden said. "I think that was the prevalent thing for me tonight, was being able to kind of force the issue with them. I know they've got some guys there when you get behind or you start to get guys on base or you get in trouble, they can do some damage with one swing of the bat."

"I'm sure that ball [Ty] Wigginton hit is probably sitting on my coffee table right now in Stockton. That's a prime example of keeping it down and not letting them hurt you."

Wigginton crushed a two-run, two-out homer in the fifth inning to left on the first pitch he saw from Braden that at-bat. His homer came after Braden issued a four-pitch walk to Garrett Atkins.

"I think he lost his concentration for a split second and they made him pay for it, but before and after that, he was sharp as you can get," Geren said.

After Braden's seven strong innings, Geren turned to his bullpen. Brad Ziegler threw a scoreless eighth and Andrew Bailey a scoreless ninth, converting his 22nd straight save opportunity, the second-longest streak in Oakland history.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington, though, was Braden's best friend Friday night, for reasons that went far beyond his two-run triple in the fourth.

Pennington put on a defensive clinic, making tough plays look easy. In the first six innings, he flawlessly fielded six ground balls and caught two fly balls. In the first inning, he went deep into the hole and showed off his strong arm, gunning down Matt Wieters at first.

With two outs in the third, Pennington went to his left to snare shortstop Cesar Izturis' ground ball. Then he smoothly spun counter-clockwise and fired a strike to first, beating Izturis. Pennington went deep in the hole again in the fourth, back-handing Nolan Reimold's liner.

"He's pitched very well ... and they played excellent defense behind him," Orioles manager Dave Trembley said. "That was the difference in the game. Pennington had a super game at short, and every ball we hit hard, they seemed to be in the right place to catch it."

First baseman Daric Barton turned in some stellar defense of his own. He made a diving catch of Miguel Tejada's foul ball after a long run in the fourth inning. He also started a pair of double-plays in the seventh and eighth, back-handing ground balls and throwing strikes to Pennington at second.

"Those were crucial times in the game, too," Geren said. "We only had a two-run lead there, getting out of the inning. He's a great first baseman."

The A's jumped to a 1-0 lead in the second inning, using back-to-back singles by Kevin Kouzmanoff and Eric Chavez and Jake Fox's sacrifice fly to right. They made it 2-0 in the third, thanks in large part to Davis' speed. Davis singled, stole second and raced to third when Wieters' throw went into center field. Even with the Orioles' infield playing in, Davis scored on Sweeney's ground ball to Izturis at short. Izturis had no choice but to throw to first.

"Everybody's getting key hits in key situations," Sweeney said. "Our pitching's unbelievable. If we can go out there and put some runs on the board ... we've got a chance every night."

Orioles aim to take A's down a peg

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The A's and Orioles are on the opposite ends of the standings in their respective divisions, but their goal for Saturday's contest is exactly the same: win the ballgame.

Following Friday's 4-2 victory in the second of a four-game series against Baltimore, Oakland now leads the American League West with an 8-4 record. The Orioles, losers of their last eight, are 1-10 and at the bottom of the AL East.

The Orioles are also hurting outside of the standings. On Friday, outfielder Felix Pie joined Mike Gonzalez and Brian Roberts on the disabled list.

"We certainly have had our share of misfortune, but honestly, we haven't helped ourselves either," Orioles manager Dave Trembley said. "We haven't helped ourselves with the opportunities that we've had. Today is a new day, we have a new game. We have another opportunity to get on track in a positive way. That's the approach that we'll all take."

Pie, who is on the disabled list with a left rotator cuff strain, has been plagued by left shoulder injuries all spring; and aggravated it while throwing home during the team's Opening Day loss and again while swinging in the seventh inning of Thursday's 6-2 defeat to the Athletics.

"I feel bad because it's the best start of the career that I've had and to have something like this set me back," Pie said. "It's disappointing the way the team is playing, they need me."

The Orioles will send Jeremy Guthrie to the hill against Oakland starter Justin Duchscherer. In his last start, Guthrie allowed three earned runs on eight hits scattered over seven innings against the Rays. In six career starts against Oakland, Guthrie is 1-3 with a 6.23 ERA.

In his most recent start against the Mariners, Duchscherer picked up his first win since July 8, 2008, by dominating Seattle for 7 1/3 innings. He gave up two hits and struck out four in a 4-0 A's victory.

In nine games (two starts) against Baltimore, Duchscherer owns a career 2-0 mark and 2.78 ERA.

The A's are hoping for another fine outing from their man on the mound. Oakland starters are 6-0 to begin the season for the first time since 2003.

"I've had difficulty so far trying to incorporate myself back into the rhythm of being out there," Duchscherer said after his last start. "It still feels like six, seven, eight innings is hard. Even though the results are there, I still feel like I'm straining and I'm pretty physically and mentally tired right now."

Orioles: Birds staying optimistic

Baltimore is a Major League-worst 1-for-38 (.026) with RISP and two outs.

"No one is happy with it, but it's done," Trembley said. "There's not a darn thing I can do about it. People are as frustrated as can possibly be. But we will win and when we start winning, I can't wait. I can't wait for us to start winning some games, so this whole experience can be a lot more pleasant than it is. Because right now, it's not very pleasant."

A's: Oakland locks up Anderson

Youth was served on Friday as the club signed Brett Anderson, 22, through the 2015 season with a four-year contract that includes team options in '14 and '15. Anderson, who is scheduled to start Sunday, has yet to allow a run in 12 innings and is 1-0 with 10 strikeouts and three walks.

Are more signings to come?

"Early part of the decade, we had the Hudsons, Mulders and Zitos. I think their performance fed off each other and ultimately the contracts followed, and it was the same with the position players," A's general manager Billy Beane said. "It does provide, for the lack of a better term, a carrot out there. I think players like to know that if they perform, they get rewarded, even at a young age. And hopefully, we can build that esprit de corp that you need to ultimately create a good, young team that has a chance to win."

Worth noting:

Oakland center fielder Ryan Sweeney extended his hitting streak to 11 games with a fifth-inning single in Friday's 4-2 victory. Left fielder Rajai Davis stole his sixth base in the third inning and is 6-for-6 for the season.

Ellis misses fifth straight game

Second baseman dealing with sore left hamstring

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's second baseman Mark Ellis was out of the starting lineup for the fifth straight game Friday with a sore left hamstring and there's still no target date for his return.

"Getting better," Ellis said after taking ground balls and working with Bob Alejo, the A's director of strength and conditioning, before Friday night's game against Baltimore.

"Getting better every day," Ellis said. "Not quite there yet. Starting to feel better."

Starting to feel better, but continuing to feel frustrated.

"Oh yeah," Ellis said. "Especially after missing time last year and the year before that. You're healthy coming into the season, you think you're going to be healthy the whole year, then something like this happens. But it will be all right. It's early in the season. Hopefully get out there and stay out there."

Adam Rosales started again at second base in place of Ellis.

"I'm going to be cautious with him, being that it's April and being that I have good backup players that are playing solid," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It gives me the luxury of being patient. He ran [Thursday] and did OK with that. Today, he actually took ground balls and did all right with that. He's getting close. It's just he has a little point of tenderness there. When that goes away, we'll feel better about putting him in there."

Ellis is hitting .345, and Rosales is at .400.

Beane pleased with start to season

OAKLAND -- After signing left-hander Brett Anderson to a new long-term contract Friday, general manager Billy Beane addressed the state of the A's through the first 11 games.

Not surprisingly, he loves what he's seen from A's pitchers so far. The staff's 2.77 ERA ranked second in the American League entering Friday night's game. A's starters were 5-0 with a 2.47 ERA.

"It's been great." Beane said. "We've got a lot of depth this year, and I think each guy isn't being asked to be that force on the staff. Each guy just hands the baton off to the next guy."

The A's hitters have been providing the pitchers more support this year.

"Some of these guys are a little bit older," Beane said. "It's still going to be a challenge for us in this league. We don't have a lot of firepower. We're going to have to do some things creatively to get some runs scored. We're going to have to get runners over. I think it's going to be a challenge for us all year, and we know that, but with this starting staff, we should be in most games, and we probably won't need a lot [of runs]."

"The starting pitching and the bullpen have been great. I think the offense has been efficient up to this point. We have a very good defense, when everybody gets out there. I think right now it's good, but it's going to get better when Coco [Crisp] gets back. Once again to come back to the starting pitching, it all starts there, and that's what we're all elated for that."

Worth noting

OAKLAND -- The A's will honor Roy Steele, their longtime public address announcer, on Saturday. He'll throw out the first pitch before the A's game against Baltimore, and the first 10,000 fans will receive Roy Steele bobbleheads. Steele, according to the team, is the first public address announcer in Major League Baseball history to have a bobblehead day. ... Catcher Kurt Suzuki was out of the starting lineup Friday night for just the second time this season. Jake Fox made his second start at catcher, both with left-hander Dallas Braden on the mound. Manager Bob Geren said he was either going to give Suzuki a day off Friday or Saturday afternoon and chose Friday. "Also, I liked the way Fox worked with Braden last time. That went well," Geren said. "[Suzuki] will probably be one of the top in games caught if he stays healthy, which he has. But he's not going to catch 162." Suzuki is off to a rough start with a .189 average. "A little anxious," Geren said. "He's swinging at a few balls he normally doesn't swing at. Everybody's patient. He's going to be fine. No worries." ... Gabe Gross started Friday night for the third time in the past five games. He started in left field in place of Travis Buck.

Rajai Davis Has Reluctant A's on the Run

Jeff Fletcher, aol.com, 4/17/2010

OAKLAND -- A's outfielder Rajai Davis obviously never read "Moneyball", or else he'd have known that he was joining an organization that had become known for indifference toward the exact skill that was his forte: speed.

"I guess it helps when you are ignorant of some things," Davis said. "That never came into my mind. I guess I'm thankful that I didn't let that affect me as a player."

Now, thanks largely to Davis, speed is an integral part of the A's offense. It is one of the reasons -- along with good pitching -- that the A's have gotten off to an 8-4 start on the heels of a strong finish in 2009. The A's have 10 stolen bases, tied for second most in the league.

"It's changed our offense a lot," second baseman Mark Ellis said. "When Raj gets on base, it changes the team a lot, makes the whole team a lot better. It's fun to watch."

It would be inaccurate to say that general manager Billy Beane has shifted his philosophy away from on-base percentage and home runs. He hasn't. It's just that the A's haven't been able to produce any players on their own who had those skills, and they haven't been able to afford any from outside the system.

So Plan B is to get speed. The A's got Davis for practically nothing, claiming him on waivers from the Giants. They also signed Coco Crisp, who is out until May with a broken finger. Shortstop Cliff Pennington and right fielder Ryan Sweeney are also above-average runners who have been encouraged to run more aggressively.

"The threat of running forces the defense to do some things they wouldn't normally do," said A's bench coach and baserunning instructor Tye Waller. "It forces the pitcher to slide step, to throw more fastballs. That type of thing adds to our offense. I'd like to have the three-run homer, but when it's not there, [running] adds another dimension to your team."

So far the A's have been around the league average in runs, despite being toward the bottom in homers and batting average. It's the sort of thing that the Angels have done for years, and the A's division rivals have noticed.

"When Raj gets on base, it changes the team a lot, makes the whole team a lot better. It's fun to watch."
- MARK ELLIS Last weekend the A's took two of three from the Angels, a series that Waller said was the A's best display of aggressive baserunning in his four seasons with the club. Angels outfielder Torii Hunter told FanHouse's Tom Krasovic after the series that he was impressed.

"Those guys are playing really good baseball," Hunter said. "They used to be station-to-station. Now they're running -- running and stealing, just always taking advantage of what I call the weak link."

"That's what I call hyenas. That's what we are. Hyenas. It's good that they're playing ball like that, and I really appreciate that. When I'm a manager one day, that's what I [will] look for."

Those comments brought a smile to Davis' face. He didn't figure to be a catalyst for organizational change when he showed up in Oakland two years ago.

Davis was 28 years old and on his third organization when the A's picked him up in April 2008. He had been with the Pirates and Giants, and both clubs seemed to view him as a fringe big leaguer. He didn't get much opportunity as an everyday player with either team.

Beane said the A's claimed him because he had good numbers in the minors (a .305 average with a .375 on-base percentage) and because he had speed.

"He brought a skill that we needed," Beane said. "He had dynamic speed. To get it as cheaply as we did, and a guy who had actually shown a history of being a decent hitter when he had a chance, we were surprised when he went through waivers and we weren't going to let it pass."

Davis still didn't get a chance to play every day until the middle of 2009, after Matt Holliday was traded.

Davis was the A's everyday center fielder starting on July 29. Up until that point, the team was 42-57, and the A's had stolen 69 bases in 99 games. Over the final 63 games, the A's went 33-30, and they stole 64 bases. They had the most steals in the American League over the final two months of the season.

Most of those steals belonged to Davis. With 41 stolen bases for the season, he became the first Oakland player since Rickey Henderson, in 1998, to steal more than 40. The only other A's player to reach that mark in the previous 30 years was Jose Canseco, who did it once.

The A's total of 133 stolen bases in 2009 was their most since 1992. As recently as 2007, they were dead last in the league with just 52 steals.

Davis plans on blowing away that total all by himself this year.

"Eighty is a pretty solid number that isn't reached too much," said Davis, mentioning a milestone no big leaguer has reached since Henderson did it in 1988. "It's a challenge. I think it's attainable."

Davis, who got some instruction from Henderson in the spring, is off to a good start. He's six-for-six so far. As long as he can hit well enough to stay in the lineup, he is going to rack up stolen bases. Last year Davis hit .305 with a .360 on-base percentage. So far this year he's hit just .245, but he's making enough impact when he is on base that his job is secure.

On Friday night, he singled, stole second, went to third on a throwing error by the catcher, and scored on a ground ball. It was a Rajai Rally reminiscent of a Rickey Rally of the 1980s and '90s.

"It's tough to take my aggressiveness away," Davis said. "That's part of me. I like to be aggressive. I like to take advantage of an area I feel is weak, right then and there. I guess that comes with being out there. You start to see things you wouldn't normally see if you weren't playing. You just have to be willing to take risks."

The success Davis has had in stealing bases and taking extra bases has trickled down to other players. Davis said he's directly encouraged players to go first to third more often.

"One time I saw a guy go first to third on a ball right up the middle and there was no throw," Davis said. "I said 'You see how easy that was if you don't shut it down?' I tell guys 'You are faster than you think. You'll have it easy.' Just encouraging guys. I think that puts a lot more pressure on the defense. I understand as an outfielder how difficult it is to get the ball and turn and throw a strike to the third baseman while the runner is in the way. A lot has to go right for the defense."

Beane added: "Guys like Raj and Coco can set the tone for guys who have good speed, and maybe give your club a little more of an aggressive mindset."

All of this speed makes for a nice sidebar, almost a diversion while the A's wait for the players that will again make them contenders. Back when the A's were winning in the early part of the decade, it made for a good story to say that guys like Scott Hatteberg (the star of "Moneyball") pushed them over the top, but it wasn't accurate. The A's won because they had very good pitching and a few very good all-around offensive players (Jason Giambi, Miguel Tejada, Eric Chavez). If the A's become consistent winners again, it will mostly be because of pitchers like Brett Anderson and young sluggers like Chris Carter, who is in Triple-A.

"We'd like to have [speed] and a bunch of guys who can hit it over the fence too," Beane said. "You'd like to have a

balanced offense. In this league, it's pretty unforgiving when it comes to runs scored. If you go play the Yankees and Red Sox, you are going to have to put some runs up on the board, because they are going to."

In the meantime, they'll be looking to guys like Davis to scratch out extra runs, 90 feet at a time.

10 rules that didn't make 'The Codes'

New book left out important guidelines like spitting and arguing with the umps

By ROBERT RUBINO, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

You might have heard about a new book, "The Baseball Codes," about "The Unwritten Rules of America's Pastime," by Jason Turbow and Michael Duca. It's been getting good reviews. But what about the top 10 unwritten rules that didn't make it into the book? Such as:

10. Spit like a man. Spitting is as traditional in baseball as the knockdown pitch. But there's more to spitting than mere expectoration. When you watch a ballgame on television, there is bound to be at least a half-dozen shots of a manager spitting. Invariably, managers are middle-aged men who simply can't get a good, stiff stream of saliva to come spewing out of their mouths like they did when they were 19-year-old bucks. Frankly, watching a manager spit ("drool" is the more accurate word) is disgusting. But a good, strong, long loogie, usually delivered by the team's stud player, is a thing of beauty. Look, there is good spitting (proud, virile, a sublime projectile) and there is cruddy spitting (the drool).
9. The rebellious third-base coach. A third-base coach is supposed to stand in a third-base coaching box while he transmits hand signals from the manager in the dugout to the batter. No third-base coach worth his sign language actually stands in the third-base coach's box. It's a matter of principle, and perhaps the origin of out-of-the-box thinking.
8. Arguing with umpires. There is a right way and a wrong way. The wrong way is to just flip out, immediately say the magic 12-letter word and get ejected from the game. Impulsive. Immature. Little entertainment value. The right way is to milk it as if you are on the stage of the San Francisco Opera. Start out meekly, merely inquisitive. Gradually build to a boiling rage. Get nose-to-nose with the ump and bob your head like a robin at a backyard bird-feeder. Gesticulate like a pro wrestler. Display facial expressions to rival the best silent-film-era thespians.
7. Closers' fashion and histrionics. Facial hair, earrings and necklaces are pretty much trademarks of ninth-inning relief pitchers, who must personalize a point-to-the-sky gesture upon getting a key out, relieved that God is on their side.
6. Post-game interviews. Good guys will accommodate the media with predictably comforting quotes about teamwork and 110-percent effort. Characters will say something unexpectedly amusing — self-deprecation works best, but benign challenges to a foe's manhood work, too. Meanies don't suffer fools or foolish questions, are clearly uncooperative and regard the media like hikers regard rattlesnakes.
5. Outfielders should never make a normal running catch when an unnecessary sliding catch can be made. Think TV highlights. Always.
4. Refrain from picking your nose. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but this ain't 1938 when the games were on radio only. You pick your nose, a television camera will pick it up, the picking of the nose will soon be available on the Internet, your friends will laugh at you, and your mother will be mortified. There is no cool way to pick your nose. Don't do it.
3. Bullpen residents — relief pitchers, second- and third-string catchers and the factotum otherwise known as bullpen coach — must work diligently to perfect the look of unendurable boredom with a clearly discernible sliver of mindless mischief. Study 14-year-old boys in chemistry classes and you'll get the proper visual inspiration.
2. Welcome to the neighborhood. Shortstops in possession of the ball should never have a foot on second base while turning a double play. Never. If you do, you're not cool, and you've violated the code. Be cool: With Astaire-like flair and smoothness, glide relatively close to the bag while turning two.
1. And the No. 1 unwritten baseball rule that didn't make it into the "The Code": Cup adjustment. Be proud. Be bold. If you adjust your cup with even the faintest bit of self-consciousness, you're violating the code. Adjust your cup for all the world to see and admire. Throw subtlety to the wind. No fear. No shame.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Carter's blast lifts Cats in home opener

By Robbie Enos

The Sacramento River Cats put on a show in front of a sellout crowd Friday, defeating the Reno Aces 8-4 on Opening Night at Raley Field.

After being held to one hit through five innings, Sacramento's offense exploded with six runs in the sixth inning to take a 6-3 lead.

The Aces were first to strike when cleanup man Bandon Allen hit a two-out, two run home run that scored Doug Deeds in the first. The ball flew over the visiting team's bullpen and landed half-way up Home Run Hill in right field.

Reno's bats stayed hot in the second, when third baseman Yunieski Sanchez and shortstop Ed Rogers led off with back-to-back singles. Carlos Corporan hit into a 4-6-3 double play to slow down Reno, but a Mark Hallberg single through the left side scored Sanchez to make it a 3-0 game.

After the quick start for the Aces, pitching and defense would take over the middle part of the game. Reno starter Billy Buckner pitched 5.0 scoreless innings, striking out seven and allowing just one hit and three base runners.

River Cat starter Kyle Middleton overcame his rough start to hold the Aces scoreless for the next three innings. Middleton would retire the side in the fourth and fifth innings.

Middleton continued strong through the sixth, once again retiring the side.

However, Buckner's run of excellent pitching would end.

After hitting Corey Wimberly with a pitch, Buckner allowed a single to outfielder Matt Carson, who now has a team-leading 13 hits. Buckner would collect a few clutch strikeouts, sitting down sluggers Jack Cust and Chris Carter. But a Michael Taylor single up the middle put the River Cats on the board and ended Buckner's night.

Reliever Zach Kroenke entered to face Dallas McPherson, who came into the game leading Sacramento with 11 RBIs. McPherson hit a Texas Leaguer into left field, scoring Carson. Catcher Josh Donaldson then walked the bases loaded for Steve Tolleson. The shortstop singled up the middle, bringing home Taylor and McPherson. McPherson appeared to injure his leg rounding third, stumbling down the base line and falling on top of home plate to put the River Cats on top, 4-3.

Eric Sogard was then hit by a pitch, again loading the bases. Wimberly followed with a single up the middle, scoring Donaldson and Tolleson. On the play, Sogard was thrown out at third, ending Kroenke's nightmare inning and giving the River Cats a three-run lead heading into the seventh.

"Their starter Buckner did a great job," River Cats hitting coach Brian McArn said. "He kept us off balance with a good curveball, and pitched a great game, but just ran out of bullets. We just kept grinding it out, got a little more selective, and got some big hits."

Kroenke's struggles continued in the seventh. Carson continued his hot hitting with a leadoff double. Chris Carter followed by parking a 1-0 pitch over the left-field fence and into the Jackson Rancheria Home Run Terrace, increasing the River Cats lead to 8-3.

"I was just trying to find a pitch that I could drive," said Carter, who has a six-game hitting streak. "The pitch was a slider, and it felt great hitting the ball hard."

Cats reliever Michael Wuertz, pitching on a rehab assignment for the Oakland A's, threw a scoreless seventh inning. Marcus McBeth surrendered a run in the eighth, after Mark Hallberg singled and left fielder Jai Miller made an errant throw to second base on a Connor Gillespie hit, allowing Hallberg to score. McBeth then struck out Allen and Ryan Roberts - the heart of Reno's order - to end the threat with an 8-4 lead.

But that would be all for the Aces, who were shut out in the ninth inning by reliever Michael Benacka, who struck out the first and last batters to close the game.

Before the game, the team and 14,014 fans paid tribute to the late Art Savage, who brought the team to the River City in 2000. The team's majority owner passed away in November.

The River Cats (6-3) will take on Reno (4-5) again on Saturday. The first 3,000 fans will receive team posters.

FOR OPENERS, IT'S THE CATS' MEOW

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee, 4/17/2010

As the setting sun gave way to a cool breeze Friday night at Raley Field, the meaning of the River Cats' home opener unfolded around the park.

For 10-year-old Drew Giglio of Elk Grove, the first home game meant coming 90 minutes before the first pitch, standing on the grass behind the right-field fence and hoping someone in batting practice would send a fly ball into his glove.

"It would be cool," he said.

For the River Cats family, the first home game of the 2010 season meant honoring Art Savage, the team's majority owner who died in November at 58.

"We'll try to make it a special night tonight, hopefully win one for him," manager Tony DeFrancesco said before an 8-4 victory over the Reno Aces.

"His vision has continued to go on. Hopefully, we'll continue the success here for him."

The River Cats honored Savage, who brought the Triple-A team to West Sacramento in 2000, in a pregame ceremony with a tribute on the new 44-foot diagonal video board.

After a moment of silence, jersey No. 1 with his name on it was retired and displayed on the leftcenter-field wall.

It was the first jersey retired in team history.

"Art is front and center for everybody tonight," said Alan Ledford, the team's president and general manager. "There's a lot of emotion."

In a home opener, there's also the anticipation of what's to come, whether you're a player, employee or one of the 14,014 spectators who filled the stands.

At 6-foot-6 and 260 pounds, Sacramento outfielder Michael Taylor cuts an imposing figure.

He's considered one of the top prospects in the A's organization.

Before Friday night's game, though, he was simply trying to savor the moment.

"I know we're supposed to get 10,000-plus tonight," he said. "I'm excited."

And not too concerned about the pressure that comes with being labeled a can't-miss prospect.

"People have expectations," Taylor said. "We're not just playing the game. We're playing for a career. ... It's a job.

"It's not just some Sunday league.

"You never know when your last game's going to be. You have to take advantage of your opportunities. ... At the end of the day, you kind of want to make it to the big-league level."

River Cats outfielder Matt Carson got his first taste of the majors last September after a late call-up to Oakland.

There's nothing he'd like more than to get back.

"Before, I wasn't sure exactly what I was playing for," he said. "Now I know. It's definitely lit the fire a little bigger."

And while Carson would rather be in Oakland, he sounded grateful for the support fans show at Raley Field.

"We feel that drive behind us," he said.

Matt Thomas, the River Cats' senior director of operations, cast a wary eye at the scoreboard underneath the new video board less than two hours before the game.

"The scoreboard, they're having a little bit of trouble," he said. "We're hoping to have it ready to go before the game starts."

That didn't happen.

While the new video board performed well, the scoreboard remained dark.

"Opening Day after the place has been asleep for the last six months, you fire some stuff up, some stuff will work for you, some stuff will give you challenges," Thomas said.

The challenge for 37-year-old concession volunteer Kelly Preddy of Citrus Heights was last-minute cleaning before the gates opened, and learning the ins and outs of a new menu.

"It's exciting, the beginning of a new season," she said. "We've got butterflies in our stomach. We're ready to go."

"I'm going to be doing cashier. I need to find out what exactly the Sacramento Dog is."

For Sacramento usher John Caffrey, 58, manning his post at sections 106 and 107, the lure was "just getting back with my co-workers."

For Sacramento's Kevin Webb, 50, there was joy in sitting behind the screen watching batting practice.

"Opening night, it's great," he said. "It brings you back to when you were a little kid playing, your Dad taking you to games."

Carmichael's Bruce Smith, 43, did just that with his son Ethan, 4, sitting on the grass near the right-field foul pole, savoring a baseball tradition.

"Just sharing with the kid," he said. "Just getting a hot dog."

And probably creating a memory.

Travs Shut Out Hounds 3-0

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

The Arkansas Travelers collected just four hits Friday night, but three of them were just what you see.

Andrew Romine sent a 2-out pop up into shallow right-center field in the third inning, and the classic "Texas Leaguer" brought home Efren Navarro with the game's first run. It would be all the Travs needed, when all was said and done.

Arkansas added the "blast" off the bat of former Major League Paul McNulty, who took Arnold Leon's 2-1 pitch out to right field for a solo home run in the seventh. Julio Perez followed with a double and scored on Alberto Rosario's perfectly-executed squeeze bunt, also in the seventh.

Starters Jeremy Thorne and Pedro Figueroa both pitched extremely well, after struggling in their previous match-up (April 10 at Citibank Ballpark). Figueroa allowed just one run on two hits with two walks and five whiffs in 6.0 innings.

The Arkansas bullpen recorded six K's in 2.1 innings, including Anthony Recker and Corey Brown, who Ryan Aldridge struck out back-to-back with two on (and the tying run at the plate) in the eighth.

Ports Drop Second Straight to Rawhide, 3-2

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Ports had no problem with collecting hits and getting runners on base-but getting those runners from first to home was a different matter. Stockton (4-4) totaled nine hits and left 15 runners on base in Friday night's 3-2 loss against the Visalia Rawhide (5-4) at Banner Island Ballpark.

Shortstop Grant Green finished the game 3x5 with an RBI and center fielder Jermaine Mitchell went 2x5 to extend his hitting streak to six games, but the Ports offensive effort wasn't enough to overcome the Rawhide, as Visalia led them to just two runs. Ports starter Kenny Smalley allowed two runs (one earned) on six hits with four strikeouts in 4.2 innings of work.

Reliever Scott Hodsdon picked up the loss as he gave up the game-winning home run to Visalia shortstop Rey Navarro in the seventh inning. Trey Barham pitched a scoreless 2.2 innings for Stockton to wrap up the game.

Stockton jumped to an early 1-0 lead in the first. Mitchell singled to kick start the offense, and moved to second on a balk by Visalia starter Ryan Cook. Green then singled to center field. With third baseman Stephen Parker at-bat, the Ports attempted a double steal. Visalia catcher Rossmel Perez threw the ball to Navarro to try to get Green in a run down at second, and Mitchell made a move for home plate. Navarro then threw the ball to Perez to make a play at the plate. Mitchell was out at home and Green stood safely at second. Parker then walked to put runners on first and second with one out. A wild pitch by Cook then advanced both runners. Right fielder Jeremy Barfield then grounded out, and Green crossed home plate for the first run of the game.

Barfield later made an incredible play in the second inning to throw out centerfielder Alfredo Marte at home handily to end the inning and end the Visalia threat.

Visalia didn't score their first run until the fourth frame, when an RBI single by designated hitter Kyle Greene brought home first baseman Paul Goldschmidt.

Stockton made it 2-1 in the bottom of the fourth. With one out, left fielder Shane Keough was hit by a pitch. He was followed on base by second baseman Jason Christian, who walked. After Mitchell flew out, Green stepped up to the plate. He singled to center field to drive home Keough. Parker hit into a fielder's choice play to end the frame.

Visalia answered right back in the top of the fifth. With one out, Navarro reached on an error by pitcher Smalley. The Ports got second baseman Brent Greer to ground out, and Smalley surrendered an RBI single to third baseman Ryan Wheeler. After that hit, the Ports pulled Smalley in favor of Hodsdon, who got Goldschmidt to strikeout to end the inning.

With the game tied 2-2, Navarro hit a solo shot to right field on a 2-1 pitch from Hodsdon to give Visalia a one-run lead in the seventh.

The Ports were unable to overcome that deficit, collecting just three hits and stranding five in the final three frames.

Stockton will take on the Rawhide for Game Three of the series at 7:05 p.m. PST on Saturday at Banner Island Ballpark. LHP Anvioris Ramirez (0-1, 9.64) will start for Stockton, while RHP Josh Collmenter (1-0, 3.60) will be on the hill for Visalia. Fans can enjoy post-game fireworks presented by Ports champion partner Jackson Rancheria Casino & Hotel after Saturday's game.

A's roving instructor and legend Rickey Henderson will continue to work with the Stockton Ports on Saturday and Sunday.

Cougars' Offense Quiet in Finale

GENEVA, III. - The Kane County Cougars were shut out for the first time this season Friday night, as they fell, 6-0, to the Beloit Snappers in front of 4,585 fans at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars are 4-2 on their nine-game homestand but dropped two of three to Beloit in the series.

Chris Mederos (1-1) got hooked with a hard-luck loss. The right-hander gave up one run on three hits in 6 2/3 innings in his second straight quality start. In the top of the seventh he allowed a two-out double and left. Then Ryan Quigley entered and allowed an RBI single to Beloit's Wang Wei Lin, and the Snappers never gave away the lead. Quigley gave up five runs in the ninth to account for the 6-0 final.

The Cougars had six hits and drew three walks but stranded 10 runners. They left the bases loaded twice. Kane Holbrooks (1-1) notched the win for the Snappers (4-5), and Steve Blevins posted his third save.

The Cougars (5-4) continue their long homestand Saturday at 5 p.m. CT when they start a three-game series against the Cedar Rapids Kernels (4-5). Justin Marks (0-0, 0.00) will face Tyler Kehrler (0-0, 0.00). The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 4:45 p.m.